



Cheetham Salt Pty Ltd Offices 71 Little Malop Street

History

Dew Brothers & Ebbels won the contract to build these offices beside their existing offices (75 Little Malop Street) in 1913. Their client was Cheetham Salt Pty Ltd (via their secretary, T R Cunningham) and the designers, Laird & Buchan.¹ The company remained there until c1987.²

Richard Cheetham was the founder of the company, having initially come to the Colony for his health in the 19th Century.³ After failure to produce salt at French Island

in the early 1880s, Cheetham achieved success at Point Henry, after leasing a site there in 1888. A retired bank manager, Alex W Cunningham, joined him as an equal partner. The partnership became a company in 1894 and Cheetham Salt P/L in 1903.⁴ His son, Andrew, also became active in the company but Alex and Andrew Cunningham and Cheetham died before the company's major growth period in the 1930s.⁵

A H Cunningham became the managing director⁶ while A J Cunningham, an engineer and the youngest son of the surviving partner, joined the firm in c1906 to carry out mechanization of the plant. After the War, in 1918, he supervised the construction of a new refinery which was

¹ Laird & Buchan drawings and contract book 11/8/1913

² Nigro, Cheetham Salt Prop. Ltd. (Deakin Univ.)

³ *Develop Victoria* 1962, p.43f

⁴ *ibid.*; Nigro, loc.cit.

⁵ Andrew Cunningham died 1921, Cheetham 1900, Alex Cunningham 1916
GA 23/5/21

opened by the Victorian Premier, Sir Harry Lawson. The firm matched the growing demand for salt with a new works at Laverton in 1924. A refinery was built there in 1940, making two production centres for the firm. Another plant came into production in 1953 on the north side of Corio Bay.¹

The ground floor of their new offices at Little Malop Street held the clerks' office at the front, with an enquiry counter, and the accountant was close behind them, guarding a large strongroom which sat next to the stair. A rear lobby led to the laboratory and drawing office and a large store were at the rear, with loading doors on to the side lane.²

Upstairs, the front office belonged to Mr. A Cunningham and opened into Mr. T Cunningham's office via folding doors. A 'typiste' occupied the other front room (8 feet by 8 feet six). Near the stairs was Mr. J Cunningham and, behind him, was a laboratory. The offices were partitioned in panelled and polished woodwork, with the segment-arched toplights in doors, typical of the era.

Description

The Little Malop Street facade is as expected for an Edwardian office, with red-brick walls, relieved with cement dressings and pressed cement details, in particular a foliated tympanum to the segment arched pediment cantilevering over the door. This is the main stylistic element, linking the design to the contemporary Queen Anne revival.³ On the parapet, in bas-relief, is the company's name formed in cement, 'The Cheetham Salt Propy Ltd,' all in sans-serif lettering.

The side elevation achieved light from the laneway for its variously sized and sited windows, being two-storey for the office section and one-storey for the rear store.

External Integrity

Generally original.

Streetscape

Originally the offices were placed among other industrial warehousing and service premises, typical of a Geelong Edwardian lane. Opposite were livery stables, blacksmiths and coach builders. In later years their former premises (75) was occupied by Sargood & Brothers and later the Richmond Brewing Co. On the James Street corner opposite was the Cresco Fertilizer building.⁴

The building is a contributing part of Precinct 5.02, which retains some of the warehouse manufacturing flavour of last and early this Century, with sites like 77-9 Little Malop Street still being evident.

Significance

The former Cheetham Salt Pty Ltd office building is near externally complete and is a fine example of an Edwardian, medium-scale custom-designed commercial use. It represents the work, historically, of Geelong's most prolific and effective architectural firm, Laird & Buchan, and

contributes to a valuable Edwardian and 19th Century commercial and warehousing streetscape.

The building also represents probably the oldest major office structure built for a Geelong firm which later gained national prominence in a new field of Colonial production. It can be identified closely with the commercially adept Cunningham family who also played a benevolent role in the community and among their workforce.

1 *ibid.*
2 Laird & Buchan Collection, BLB-6, GHRC, signed T Tisdall, 14/8/1913. Geelong Building Surveyor
3 *ibid.*
4 D1915-30